

## Dec. 26 Ice Hockey

### Depth comes through as Steinert snaps losing streak with win over 'Stars

By Tony Piscotta  
Fish4Scores.com

**Dec. 26:** The nightcap of the first night's action in the 2011 Hamilton Holiday Classic offered unique challenges for both Steinert and Nottingham.

The Spartans, coming off three straight losses and playing without leading scorer Joe Konrath, were looking to get things back on track and see how freshman goalie Anthony Pasqua would fair in his first varsity contest.

Nottingham, despite losing its first eight games, was coming off of its best effort of the season in a game against West Windsor-Plainsboro South and hoping to carry the momentum of that game into this week's tournament.

For Steinert, the evening was a success - eight different players had points and Pasqua stopped 15 of 17 shots as the Spartans (5-3) skated to an 8-2 win.

"After three losses, to win 8-2 tonight was big," said junior Alex Verdi, who had three assists for the Spartans. "It was good to have us change things up and get more people scoring. It'll help our lines (when Konrath, Ryan Zujkowski and some of the other missing Spartans get back).

For Nottingham Coach Alex Chis-Luca, whose team appeared to take a big step forward a week ago, the game was a bit of a disappointment, though the team did rally in the third to tie the period 1-1 and take away 1/2 point in the tournament standings.

"We had to get them to wake up," said Chis-Luca when asked what he told the team during a second period time-out which led to the Northstars first goal shortly thereafter. "Maybe they had too much Christmas turkey or Christmas stuffing or were over-loaded or just in some kind of Christmas slump."

Things looked promising for Nottingham in the early going as the Northstars had the game's first three shots but Steinert capitalized on its first opportunity when sophomore Tanner Dow took a shot from the left circle and squeezed the puck into the net for the game's first score with 6:33 left in the period.

After a pair of point blank stops by Nottingham junior goalie Kyle O'Byrne, Dow struck again, this time tucking the rebound of his own shot past the Northstars netminder for a 2-0 lead with just



*Tanner Dow scored three goals to help Steinert get past Nottingham in the Hornet Holiday Classic tonight (Photo by John Blaine/purchase photos by e-mailing [jbsportsphoto@aol.com](mailto:jbsportsphoto@aol.com)).*

over two minutes left in the first.

"We started off pretty hard, we knew we were going to be short-handed with guys at tournaments or with injuries," said Steinert coach Ryan DeClerico, who was concerned that the Spartans might have taken Nottingham lightly having beaten them by the same 8-2 score earlier this season.

"It doesn't matter who we play, we want them to give an honest effort and play to the best of their ability. Even though we beat Nottingham before, with the guys we lost we didn't want to go out there and not play hard."

And while Pasqua was only tested a handful of times, DeClerico was glad the team rallied around the freshman.

"He wanted to get his first varsity win," said DeClerico. "We wanted to do a good job in the defensive zone and let him see the puck early and get comfortable. If you can get a goalie to feel the puck he can get some confidence.

The Northstars, and particularly O'Byrne, who stopped Steinert senior defenseman Andrew Dudich on three separate prime scoring opportunities, kept the Spartans scoreless in the second; until once again taking an ill-advised penalty.

Junior Kyle Ballschneider was called for boarding at 9:34, his second penalty of the game, and the Spartans capitalized. Verdi and senior forward Sean Clinedinst did a nice job of applying offensive pressure in the left corner and then Clinedinst fed the puck to Dudich, who wristed a quick shot past O'Byrne.

Freshman Christian Clayton scored for the Spartans at 4:52 to make the game 4-0 and then Dudich scored his second goal on a semi-breakaway less than a minute later, prompting Chis-Luca's aforementioned timeout.

The move briefly ignited the Northstars, as the makeshift line of Matt MacNeal, Kevin Fuller and sophomore Jorge Bennett applied pressure all over the Spartans' zone before MacNeal finally tucked the puck past Pasqua to put the Northstars on the board.

A roughing penalty against Dudich with just under two minutes left in the period looked like it might be a chance for the Northstars to further chip away at the lead - instead it was Steinert that scored two short-handed goals.

Dow completed his hat trick with a beautiful screen shot from the left circle that O'Byrne never had a chance to see with 1:19 left. Junior defenseman Peter Pitman, again shooting through a screen of players, scored the first goal of his career with 55.2 seconds left to stretch the Steinert lead to 7-1.

"We fell apart on the power play," said Chis-Luca, "We lost our confidence"

To their credit, the Northstars rallied in the third period - as the two team's traded single goals.

In fact, it looked like Nottingham might capture one point in the tournament standings when MacNeal scored his second goal of the game on a shot from the right circle with 5:02 left in the game. However, with 1:07 remaining Clinedinst, who earlier in the period had whistled one shot over the net on a breakaway and had another potential goal disallowed when it was ruled he directed the puck in with his skate, ripped a shot from the slot for the game's final goal.

In an effort to get the one tournament point, Chis-Luca pulled the goalie with an offensive zone face off and a power play with 28.3 seconds left in the third. Though the Northstars came close, the game ended with the puck in the crease in front of Pasqua but the Spartans penalty killers doing a nice job of preventing any Northstars from getting a stick on it.

"We had more energy (in the third period)", said Chis-Luca. "We just have to keep talking to them. Telling them they're better than (the 8-2 score). "

For Steinert, the team effort was the thing that was most encouraging. While the "Super Six" was temporarily reduced to the "Four Survivors" (Clinedinst, Dow, Dudich and Verdi minus Konrath and Zujkowski), there was plenty of support.

Clinedinst (1 goal, 3 assists), Dow (3 goals), Dudich (2 goals) and Verdi (3 assists) provided the bulk of the offense, but it was the play of the support players like Pitman, freshmen Aaron Ragnacci (2 assists) and Clayton (1 goal and 1 assist) that was equally encouraging for DeClerico.

"We tell them when you're going as hard as you can good results will happen," said DeClerico. "We were able to get everybody multiple shifts. We had basically two full lines missing so (the guys that don't normally play as much) were going to be cycling into the lines anyway. It was good to be able to get them a chance to play as much as they did."

Under the scoring system used for the tournament, the Spartans picked up 3 1/2 of four possible points - and are currently tied for second with Hamilton. The Northstars received 1/2 point for tying the third period.

Steinert will need the depth it showed against Nottingham when it faces St. Rose (Belmar) in the 6 p.m. game Wednesday. St. Rose (6-1) defeated Hightstown, 10-0 in the middle game tonight and looks like it will challenge for the championship in the Shore D league.

"The Shore Conference generally has some very strong teams and they've beaten some quality opponents," said DeClerico. "Even though they're a private school it definitely helps when you go out there and play some strong teams outside the CVC. It's going to take a lot for us to match them. They're a strong team."

For Nottingham the next opponent is a familiar one - the host team, Hamilton West, who they face in Tuesday's opening game at 4. The Hornets defeated Nottingham 8-3 last Wednesday and the two schools were long-time Patriot Division rivals before Hamilton West moved up to the Valley Division this year.

"The loss we had (last week) should be a motivating factor and them being cross-town rivals should motivate us," said Chis-Luca.